

# A key to avoiding arguments

Ray Slade

How easy it is to overlook the most significant thing standing in our way of being understood

Many couples have sat down in front of a counsellor and said, "We're not communicating very well". Individuals of course, say the same thing.

Naïve counsellors may then start down the track of upskilling them on the art of communication without realising they are being fooled.

Funny, but most couples seemed to know how to communicate when they were going together. Strange how they no longer think they have those skills.

It's even stranger when you discover that one is a school teacher and the other a Human Relations manager of a large company. Both positions where excellent communication skills are mandatory. Clearly something else is at the heart of the problem.

## A perfect fog

We're all the same really. If someone offends us, we tend to avoid that person either for a while or indefinitely, and if we do meet, conversation can be very stilted and limited to the essentials.

There might be numerous culprits hiding in the cupboard that have

brought about a sudden or gradual decline in willingness to talk. These could be some of them ...

... one person is dominating the relationship... an affair ... laziness ... intolerance of one another's differences ... hostility over an event ... unmet expectations ... bullying ... the list is endless. But there's a perfect fog that surrounds the problem nearly every time.

## What's really going on?

Conversation for most of us, can be like a multi-layered cake. It might have chocolate on the outside, but as we bite into it, we discover other things hiding below.

There's a layer of soft cake, and underneath that is a layer of custard. We think we've reached the heart of it, but another bite reveals there's more cake under the custard.

Well, at last we got there. No we haven't. One more bite reveals what's really in the middle. It's a big red cherry. We had to bite through five layers before we got to what was in the middle.

## Conversation is much the same

When we first meet someone or start a conversation, we can begin with what is really just the topping on the outside of the cake.

*"How you going"*

*"Well thanks"*

*"What have you been doing lately"*

*"Not much. What about you"?*

*"Same. Anyhow, good to see you"*

*"Yeah. I'll catch you later".*

Nothing much scintillating about that conversation. If we want more meaningful conversation, we have to bite further into the cake.

# Understanding the layers

Layered conversation is quite normal for most people. However, very few know how to or even wish to venture past the first few layers. Sadly, very few ever get to the cherry inside.

## Why is this?

The layers on the outside are usually very safe. It's unlikely that a chef would put very hot chilli on the outside. Few would continue to eat it. Likewise, we usually start our conversation with something easy.

But something easy, doesn't always tell others what we're really thinking or reveal the true thoughts or feelings deep inside us.

## How does that affect our relationship?

Tension, arguments, hostility and frustration usually begin as we start a conversation and it begins to go horribly wrong. In short, what we really wished to say becomes completely misunderstood.

The response we get is nothing like we were expecting, and the discussion goes totally in the wrong direction.

This is often because the first thing we said was not what we were really trying to say. Why don't we say what we really mean? In other words, why don't we reveal the cherry in the middle of the cake?

## Privacy, Fear or unidentified?

Typical reasons we don't say what we really mean can include...

- We are very private people and don't reveal our deeper thoughts and feelings easily;
- We are afraid to say what we really mean for fear of the reaction we might get;

- We really don't know what our deepest thoughts and emotions are.

## What does this sound like?

Listen in to Jen and Alan as they attempt to talk about something significant in their lives...

Alan goes to the refrigerator and takes out another can.

*Jen Don't you think you've had enough?*

*Alan There you go again. You're always nagging me*

*Jen Well... you drink too much.*

*Alan I do not drink too much. You're always saying that.*

Jen falls into silence. Alan continues reading his newspaper

How typical is this kind of conversation? Sad too, that it ended the way it always does. Going nowhere. Jen is left frustrated, Alan is now annoyed.

## Biting into the layers

A little bit of time spent with Jen, would reveal that what she said, was not what she was meaning. What did she really mean?

Behind the comment...

*... "well, you drink too much"*

was her unexpressed concern,

*... when you drink too much, you isolate yourself and withdraw from us.*

But behind that layer, was another...

*... when you isolate, you aren't spending time with the family*

Behind that layer, was a deeper concern...

*... you're not actually spending time with me*

Behind that layer, was another...

*... if you're not wanting to spend time with me, what's wrong with me?*

And the cherry, although, not a sweet one, behind that is the deepest

part of her concern...

*... maybe you don't love me anymore.*

## The Cherry pip that's hard to swallow

For human beings all over the world, there's an ultimate kind of pip that we all try to avoid.

If we think someone doesn't like or love me any longer, the question in my mind is,

*... maybe I'm not loveable any longer.*

## The wrong question gets the wrong result

When we really want to know something, we need to think carefully about how we express it. Nobody knows or has the vaguest idea what we are feeling deep inside, or even our thoughts about those feelings.

**If we want someone to know how we are feeling, we need to tell them.**

Many of us frequently become frustrated when conversation doesn't go the way we thought it would. Much of the time it's our own fault simply because we asked the wrong question.

Knowing how and when to ask the right question is a different matter.

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## Other things to read related to this

Read the book: **Identity and Uniqueness**. Discovering what and who you really are. **Ray Slade**

Book: **Lost Connection**, what we really want and how to get it, Ray Slade